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Marrying Belinda

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By
GRACE COOKE STRONG

BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1912

Marrying Belinda

PS 635

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CHARACTERS

HERMAN LATHROP, *a wealthy banker.*
SIDNEY CRAIG, *his nephew.*
LEE BENTON, *his private secretary.*
HENRY GRAY, *a fortune-hunter.*
MRS. LATHROP, *Lathrop's wife.*
SELINA LATHROP, *his sister.*
BELINDA, *his daughter.*
MARIE, *a maid.*

TIME—Evening of June 1st, present year.



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NO. 1

Marrying Belinda

SCENE.—*Library at HERMAN LATHROP'S home. A window and one door with a key in it. Large screen near door, hiding one corner of the room. Desk covered with books and papers, and on it, a telephone. Several easy chairs. Bell for servant.*

(As the curtain rises, LEE BENTON is seated at the desk, writing. BELINDA, in white, is sitting near.)

BENTON (*laying down pen*). You certainly have hit the nail on the head this time. I'll see that this article is in to-morrow's *Tribune*. And how you've worked! What would the cause of suffrage do without you?

BEL. (*laughing*). You overestimate my influence. At any rate, whatever good my feeble efforts have accomplished is due to you. I can never thank you enough.

BENTON (*rising and coming nearer her*). Thank me? When it's I that should be, and am overwhelmed with gratitude for what you have brought into my life. I came here to serve your father in a humble capacity, and you've given me your beautiful friendship and —— (*Noise without*.)

BEL. (*hastily rising*). Some one is coming! (*Adds indifferently*.) I thank you, Mr. Benton, for your kind assistance.

Enter MR. and MRS. LATHROP.

BENTON (*gathering up papers*). You are most welcome, Miss Lathrop. (*To MR. L.*) Is there anything more that I can do for you, sir?

MR. L. (*sitting down*). Nothing to-night, Benton; but don't hurry. Stay and chat a while.

MRS. L. (*sitting down*). It will be a relief to talk to sensible people after catering so long to Belinda's whims.

BENTON. Thank you. I'll not linger this evening, but I'll be within call down-stairs. [*Exit*.]

(BEL. moves toward the door.)

MR. L. Wait a minute, Belinda. There's a matter I want to talk over with you.

BEL. (*wearily sitting down*). We've thrashed this out so many times, father. It's of no use to talk any more.

MR. L. (*sternly*). It's got to be settled. Three months have passed since I received your aunt's letter demanding that you drop this foolish woman's suffrage business and settle down in marriage like any sensible woman, before January first, or else be disinherited. Still you continue to idle away your time as if there were nothing at stake. I won't have it!

BEL. (*indignantly*). My aunt or any one else has no right to demand that I marry before a certain time.

MR. L. She has a right to dispose of her money as she sees fit.

BEL. (*carelessly*). Then let her dispose of it.

MR. L. Belinda, are you crazy? Half a million dollars, and you speak of it as if it were a box at the opera! If you have so little anxiety for your future, I'll be anxious for you. Here's Henry Gray, ready to marry you at any moment —

MRS. L. Herman, do read Selina's letter over again. Belinda may have forgotten the conditions.

BEL. I've not forgotten.

MR. L. (*fumbling in his pocket*). I believe I have it, no, yes, here it is. (*Draws out letter and opens it. As he reads, MRS. L. listens with interest; BEL. listens indifferently. He has hardly begun, when SIDNEY CRAIG enters the room noiselessly, perceives what is going on, and slips unobserved behind the screen, where he remains, an unnoticed but eager listener. MR. L. reads.*) "My dear Brother: Your last letter was duly received. I am glad that you and your family are well, and I wish that I could say the same of myself. I am an old woman, and life is short at the best. As you are aware, I have spent no little time in consideration as to the most feasible disposition that I can make of my earthly effects when I no longer have need of them. (*Enter CRAIG.*) With the exception of you and Louise, I have no near kin save your daughter Belinda and my nephew, Sidney Craig. I do not like Sidney Craig: he is an idle, envious fellow, undeserving of good fortune. My wish is to appropriately remember him, and then leave the bulk of my estate to Belinda. But—I hear that Belinda has espoused this abominable cause of female suffrage, with which I have no sympathy; that she writes for the newspapers and even speaks in public,

which no woman of the Lathrop family has ever been known to do before. Moreover, I learn that she has refused many advantageous offers of marriage—Henry Gray's among them—and is obsessed with this disgraceful agitation. Now my ultimatum is this: I am coming to your home January first, arriving at nine o'clock in the evening. Let Belinda be suitably married before my arrival, or I shall reverse my decision, Sidney Craig will be the gainer, and Belinda may content herself with Sidney's portion. Trusting that you will consider this a fair and reasonable proposition, I remain, Your affectionate sister, Selina Lathrop."

BEL. A most fiendish proposition, and quite worthy of the Middle Ages!

MRS. L. You know, Belinda, that your aunt is most eccentric, but we can hardly afford not to humor her. Your part is certainly easy. Henry Gray is a most estimable young man, whom I've no doubt you'll marry some day. Why not now, thus please your aunt and make us all happy?

BEL. (*bitterly*). Why not say, sell myself for half a million dollars?

MRS. L. Your words are unjust, child. Herman, give me the letter. Perhaps you construe it harsher than it is.

MR. L. (*handing Mrs. L. the letter*). There's no doubt as to your aunt's meaning, Belinda; and, while I should be the last to urge you into a disagreeable marriage, I think our friend Gray a most admirable young fellow, one fitted in every way to make you happy, and whom your aunt —

MRS. L. (*springing from her chair*). Merciful heavens, Herman, why didn't you show me this letter before?

MR. L. (*excitedly*). What's the matter?

MRS. L. What shall we do? This date that you have read as January first is *June* first!

MR. L. Impossible! Why, that's — (*Seizes letter.*) I believe it is!

BEL. Give me the letter. (*MR. L. hands her the letter.*) It is. Father, can't you read? It's June as plain as possible!

MR. L. (*weakly*). My eyes —

MRS. L. It's to-day. To-day is June first.

(*Falls into chair.*)

MR. L. (*consulting calendar*). It is to-day. What can be done?

MRS. L. And Selina will be here at nine !

MR. L. She will be furious !

BEL. (*calmly*). Fate is kind to Sidney Craig.

MRS. L. See what you've done, you ungrateful girl. If you hadn't procrastinated —

MR. L. She isn't to blame ; it's my fault. I thought we had six months. She might have given in before January.

BEL. Yes, father, I might—perhaps, I might—have given in. But it's too late now.

MR. L. (*looking at watch*). Is it too late ? Let me think. If Gray can get a license, there's time yet. I'll call him up.

(*Seizes telephone.*)

MRS. L. Herman, are you crazy ?

BEL. (*placing her hand on her father's arm*). Father, you shall not —

MR. L. (*irritably*). Leave me alone. (*Takes down receiver.*) Central, give me 494-2.....YesIs this Henry Gray's house ?.....Oh, is it you, Henry ? This is Lathrop talking.....Good.....You know that matter of my sister's money ; I've explained it to you.....Well, I've made a mistake. She wants Belinda to be married before June first instead of January first.....No, I'm not crazy.....I want you and Belinda to be married this evening !.....What's that ?... ...Yes, she'll agree.....Call up Horton ; get a special license.....Come to the house as soon as possible.....You're a brick !.....I'll get the rector.....We'll expect you.....Good-bye.

(*Hangs up receiver.*)

BEL. What have you done ?

MR. L. Never mind what I've done. I'm going to save your fortune for you in spite of yourself. (*Takes down receiver.*) Give me 332-4.....Hello, is this Doctor Bardsley's house ?.....Yes, I want to speak with the doctor.....Is this you, Doctor Bardsley ?.....I'm Lathrop—Herman Lathrop. Can you come up to the house to officiate at a marriage ?.....No, it's my daughter.....Yes, it is sudden, very sudden. Will explain later.....What's that ?.....Terrible cold—in June ?Can't we come to your house ? Certainly, doctor.....Yes... ...Yes.....Yes, we'll be there in half an hour.....Good-bye. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

MRS. L. What does Doctor Bardsley say ?

MR. L. He doesn't know what to say ; but he's sick, so we've got to go to his house. I'll 'phone Gray to go to the rector's—he won't have time to come here first.

BEL. Won't you listen to me ?

MR. L. No, I'm arranging this to suit myself. Some day you'll thank me. (*BEL. begins to cry ; her mother tries to comfort her. MR. L. seizes the receiver.*) Give me 494-2Is this Henry Gray's?.....I'm Herman Lathrop. I want Mr. Gray.....He's just gone out?.....Can't you call him back?Good. Tell him to go to Doctor Bardsley's house at Warrington Place instead of coming to my home.....Thank you.....Good-bye. (*Hangs up receiver.*) There, Belinda, don't cry. We'll have to start for the rectory in a minute. (*Rings bell.*) On our way back, we'll stop at the station for Selina. Whew ! I haven't hurried so much in thirty years. (*Enter MARIE.*) Tell John to have the car at the door with all possible speed.

MARIE. Yes, sir.

MRS. L. And, Marie, bring my wraps and Miss Lathrop's here, please ; and tell the cook to prepare luncheon for six.

MARIE. Yes, marm.

[*Exit.*

BEL. Now, father, I'm not going to —

MR. L. Belinda, not a word. Everything is working out far better than I dared to hope. We'll have the better of Selina yet. You've just said that you would have given in before January. Why not now ?

BEL. But it wouldn't have been —

Enter MARIE, with wraps.

MARIE. Please, sir, John says he has the car apart, and he can't be ready before half an hour, sir.

MR. L. Furyation ! What a time to be tinkering with the machine ! Put on your wraps ; we'll have to go by trolley.

MRS. L. My dear, I'm so weak and nervous, I can never walk to the trolley. My poor nerves —

MR. L. Then we'll send Belinda ahead. I tell you — Benton will go with her. Then we can all come back in the auto.

BEL. Oh, father !

MR. L. (*to MARIE*). Tell Mr. Benton to step this way. (*Exit MARIE.*) Belinda, put on your wraps.

MRS. L. (*helping BEL. with her wraps*). It's lucky that you have on your white dress, dear. Nothing could be more

appropriate ; but, my dear child, this is not the wedding that I had planned for you.

BEL. (*bitterly*). It will do as well as any other.

BENTON (*entering*). You wish me, sir ?

MR. L. Yes. I've a rather delicate matter on hand to-night ; but you have served me faithfully, and I feel that I can safely repose confidence in you.

BENTON. I hope so, sir.

MR. L. A business matter has arisen that unfortunately necessitates my daughter's being married to-night — Why, what is the matter ?

BENTON (*unsteadily*). Miss Lathrop—married to-night—I don't understand.

MR. L. I hardly wonder. By a strange whim, my sister Selina, a most eccentric person, as you know, demands that Belinda be married before her arrival which may be to-night at nine o'clock. A mistake of mine accounts for our not realizing sooner the necessity for prompt action.

BENTON. But who — ? I beg your pardon.

(*Puts his hand to his head as if confused.*)

MR. L. A most natural query, sir, as my daughter's engagement has not been announced. However, Henry Gray, a most estimable young man that has long been devotedly attached to Belinda, is good enough to waive conventionality, and Doctor Bardsley is to marry them this evening.

BENTON. It seems very sudden. I can hardly realize —

MR. L. Exactly. We can scarcely realize it ourselves. But it is now time for Belinda to be at the rectory, where Mr. Gray will join her. Will you be so good as to accompany her, and Mrs. Lathrop and I will follow shortly in the motor ?

BENTON (*to BEL.*). Is it your wish, Miss Lathrop ?

BEL. Yes.

BENTON (*mechanically*). Then let us lose no time.

MR. L. That's my good girl. (*Kisses BEL.*)

MRS. L. We will soon be with you. (*Kisses BEL. Exeunt BEL. with BENTON.*) Oh, this excitement is too much—my poor nerves ! (*Sinks into chair.*)

MR. L. (*seizing fan and fanning MRS. L. vigorously*). There, there, Louise, think of what we have done. My prompt action has saved half a million for our child and settled her for life. I feel that I am worthy of congratulations.

(While he is speaking CRAIG pretends to enter the room.)

CRAIG. Good-evening, Uncle Herman.

MR. L. (with perceptible annoyance). Why, Craig, this is indeed a surprise.

MRS. L. (weakly). How do you do?

CRAIG (sitting down nonchalantly). Quite well, aunt. Fact is, I was passing and thought I would stop in for a few moments.

MR. L. (with embarrassment). Quite right. Glad to see you. Hope you'll come again—that is—your aunt and I have a most important engagement. To tell the truth, Selina is coming this evening, and we're going to the station —

CRAIG (easily). Don't let me detain you for the world. If you don't mind, I'll sit here and read until you return. (Picks up newspaper.) I'd uncommonly like to see Aunt Selina.

MRS. L. Now that's good of you. You're sure that you will not be lonesome?

CRAIG. Perfectly sure. I'll make myself completely at home.

MR. L. We shall not be gone very long.

CRAIG. But don't hurry on my account. I —

MARIE (entering). The auto is ready, sir.

MRS. L. Oh, dear, I can never go.

MR. L. Nonsense, Louise, we have no time to waste. We've got to be on time for the—for Selina.

CRAIG (innocently). By all means.

(MARIE helps MRS. L. with her wraps.)

MRS. L. I'm ready now, Herman.

MR. L. Good! Now, nephew, make yourself at home. (Points to desk.) There's all the magazines.

MRS. L. You must stay for luncheon after we get back. Good-bye.

CRAIG. I will, thank you. Good-bye. (Exeunt MR. L. with MRS. L.) Marie!

MARIE. Yes, sir.

CRAIG. If a gentleman named Gray should happen to call, be sure to send him up to me. Don't let him go away.

(Hands her coin.)

MARIE (*looking at coin delightedly*). Thank you, sir. I'll send him up. (*Goes to door.*)

CRAIG. And, Marie.

MARIE. Yes?

CRAIG. Don't be surprised at anything you may hear. I may have to detain him a few minutes. If this bell rings while he is here, you needn't come. Understand?

MARIE. I understand.

CRAIG. That is all.

MARIE. Thank you, sir.

[*Exit.*]

CRAIG (*moodily*). Half a million dollars missed me by only an hour. Just my infernal luck. (*Starts up.*) Perhaps I can save it yet. If I could only get hold of Gray. (*Seizes telephone. Noise without. Puts down telephone and tiptoes to door.*) I believe that's Gray now. (*MARIE ushers in HENRY GRAY, then goes out. CRAIG, cordially.*) Delighted to see you, Gray.

(*Unseen by GRAY, he locks the door and puts the key in his pocket.*)

GRAY (*confusedly*). Why, I don't understand. Where's Mr. Lathrop—Belinda?

CRAIG. Gone, my dear friend, gone.

GRAY. Where?

CRAIG. To the rector's, where they are awaiting the blushing bridegroom. Didn't you get the message?

GRAY (*excitedly*). What message?

CRAIG (*ecstatically*). Some way I felt that it was sent too late.

GRAY (*angrily*). What do you mean?

CRAIG. My uncle 'phoned your housekeeper to tell you to go to the rectory rather than come here. She said you were just leaving.

GRAY. I must have gotten out of hearing. Why, I'll have to hurry. (*Tries door and turns back in astonishment at finding it locked.*) What—what does this mean?

CRAIG. Not so fast, Mr. Gray. I want to talk to you.

GRAY (*angrily*). Why, man, don't you know that I'm to be married to-night?

CRAIG (*with emphasis*). Pardon me, Mr. Gray, but I don't know anything of the kind.

GRAY. Why, this is an outrage—an insult. Open that door at once.

CRAIG (*laughing*). Suppose I refuse?

GRAY. I'll ring for the servants. (*Seizes bell*.)

CRAIG. They have their instructions.

GRAY (*dropping bell*). Do you know to what you're laying yourself liable?

CRAIG (*imperturbably*). I'm willing to risk it.

GRAY (*going to window*). I'll get out —

CRAIG. I wouldn't jump; it's three stories.

GRAY. I am at a loss to account for your peculiar behavior. You must know that I have not a minute to waste. Are you crazy?

CRAIG. Think very hard, Mr. Gray, and then see if I necessarily need to be insane to wish to detain you until the arrival of my aged relative.

GRAY. Why, why—I see—if Belinda is not married before her aunt's arrival, you get the money.

CRAIG. Exactly. I congratulate you on your astuteness, Mr. Gray.

GRAY (*angrily pacing the floor*). You are a wretch, a fiendish, diabolical schemer. I'll expose you before the whole world.

CRAIG. Not so fast. Suppose we sit down, and I'll convince you that I have more altruistic reasons for preventing this marriage than you give me credit for.

GRAY. I'll be —

CRAIG (*sternly imperious*). Sit down!

GRAY (*sitting down*). If you'll let me out —

CRAIG (*sitting down*). When—I'm ready. Now let's thrash this matter out. Do you remember writing a letter in the library of the Century Club on a certain Thursday afternoon of last month?

GRAY. I often write letters —

CRAIG. Well, this particular time I was in the room. It was a windy day, Mr. Gray, and the windows were open. As you left the desk to speak to a friend, a gust of wind blew the last sheet of your letter to my feet. I picked it up. (*Takes paper from pocket*.) Here it is.

GRAY (*springing to his feet*). You dared to read —

CRAIG. I'm playing a big game, Gray, and I'm not handing back the weapons Fate puts in my hands. Do you wish me to read you a sentence or two from this sheet?

GRAY (*in confusion*). One doesn't always mean —

CRAIG. You doubtless don't mean this, but you've writ-

ten it. That's all I care. (*Reads.*) "No, I'm not ready for congrats yet, as Miss High and Mighty doesn't seem overanxious to drop suffrage and settle down; heavens, Lawrence, if it wasn't for Aunt Selina—bless her dear old soul—I'd chuck the whole business and marry little Irene, who doesn't care for woman's suffrage, and who thinks yours truly a poet's dream. But one can't afford to let sentiment stand in the way of half a million." (*Puts down letter.*) I think that will do nicely.

GRAY. No one will believe —

CRAIG. It's over your signature.

GRAY. You're a sneaking —

CRAIG. Be careful. As a member of the family, I cannot see our little Belinda married to a fortune-hunter.

GRAY. Perhaps Mr. Lathrop will hardly thank you for your interference.

CRAIG. If Uncle Lathrop's going to be huffy, I'll marry Belinda myself.

GRAY. She has accepted me.

CRAIG (*significantly*). Do you want her minus half a million?

GRAY. Why—er—I —

CRAIG. There, I knew it! (*Looks at watch.*) Come now, Gray, it's time for Aunt Selina. You've lost the money, but there's yet time to save your spotless reputation. Tell Lathrop that you have been unavoidably detained, and I'll keep mum about this letter. One word from you, and I'll show the Lathrops just what a prize they've lost. (*Noise without.*) Come, what will you do?

GRAY (*sullenly*). I'll keep still.

CRAIG. That's the stuff! (*Unlocks door and puts letter in his pocket.*) Remember your part now.

Enter MR. L., MRS. L., BEL., and BENTON, with hats and wraps, and in various stages of agitation. MRS. L. falls weakly into a chair. BENTON fans her.

MR. L. Why, what does this mean? Gray, you here? We've been waiting at the rectory until we're nearly crazy. It's nine o'clock. Didn't you get my message?

GRAY. I came here as you told me. I've been unavoidably detained—about the license.

MR. L. I 'phoned you to come to the rectory.

GRAY. I didn't get the message. (*To BEL.*) Belinda, what can you think of me? Can we not go back?

BEL. (*coldly*). If father wishes.

MR. L. (*nervously*). There is no time. Craig, couldn't you do anything?

CRAIG (*innocently*). Mr. Gray just came in, uncle, and I could only tell him that you had gone out.

MR. L. True. Well, we will go back. (*Looks at watch*.) Heavens, I've forgotten Selina! Her train is more than due. I hope it's late. (*Rings bell*.) We must do something.

MRS. L. (*her handkerchief to her eyes*). Selina will never forgive us.

Enter MARIE.

MR. L. (*to MARIE*). Tell John to go to the station for Miss Selina with all possible speed. (*Exit MARIE*.) And, Benton, run across the street for the Baptist minister. He'll do as well as anybody. (*Noise without*.) What's this?

Enter SELINA LATHROP, dressed for traveling, with various bundles and a small dog.

SEL. Of all things! I found the door open and walked right up. Are you all petrified that you allow a poor old lady, arriving in the city at nine o'clock at night, to drive through the streets alone in a hired conveyance?

MR. L. (*pleasantly*). My dear Selina —

SEL. Don't apologize. You've known I was coming for three months. Don't all look so frightened. Have I dropped in at a wedding or a funeral?

BENTON (*pushing forward an easy chair*). Won't you sit down, Miss Selina? Let me take your wraps.

SEL. (*sitting down and removing wraps*). Thank you, Lee Benton. You're a thoughtful young man. I don't suppose it ever occurred to any of the rest of you that I might be tired after riding from Chicago. Where's the maid?

MR. L. (*ringing bell*). She will be here directly, sister.

SEL. I trust she will. How do you do, Nephew Craig? As idle as ever, I suppose?

CRAIG (*significantly*). I trust that I've been improving my time well lately.

SEL. (*grimly*). There's room for improvement in you, goodness knows. (*Enter MARIE. SEL. hands her the dog*.) Marie, please see that Jewel has a cup of warm milk at once, and then place him where he may sleep undisturbed until I call him. You'll find his bed in this package. (*Gives her bundle*.)

MARIE (*giggling*). Yes, marm.

SEL. Be sure that he doesn't lie in a draft.

MARIE. Yes, marm.

[*Exit, with dog.*

SEL. Belinda !

BEL. Yes, aunt. (*Kisses her.*)

SEL. I haven't heard of your wedding yet.

BEL. (*sitting down*). No, I fear you haven't.

SEL. Well, so much the better for somebody else I know.

(*Looks at CRAIG.*) Still you might have humored an old lady's whim. Herman, Louise, couldn't you do anything with her ?

MR. L. (*irritably*). If I could have an opportunity to speak, I could explain a good deal.

SEL. I'm sure we're all listening.

MR. L. First let me present to you my friend, Mr. Gray.

SEL. Glad to know you, Mr. Gray. I've often heard of you.

(*Gives him her hand.*)

GRAY. The pleasure is all mine, Miss Lathrop.

MR. L. Mr. Gray and Belinda were to have been married this evening, had not an unfortunate circumstance detained Mr. Gray and prevented the performance of the ceremony before your arrival.

SEL. Was there any particular reason why this ceremony was postponed until the eleventh hour ?

MR. L. A *very* particular reason, Selina, which I can explain.

MRS. L. It isn't Belinda's fault.

SEL. (*sarcastically*). I suppose not, and it isn't Belinda's fault that she has played with her prospects all these months.

GRAY. Dear Miss Lathrop, why can we not be married now ? We are all ready, the minister will soon be here —

SEL. (*rising*). I'm sorry, Mr. Gray, but when I say a thing, I never retreat. Marry Belinda when you will, but I am through with her. Sidney Craig, you may come to see me in the morning.

CRAIG. Thank you.

(GRAY *glares at him.*)

MRS. L. (*in tears*). Oh, Selina, how can you be so cruel ?

MR. L. You are unjust, sister. I can show you —

SEL. (*resuming her seat*). It's of no use to whine ; you've had your chance. I am adamant. Lee Benton, you're the

most sensible man I know. Have I not played fair in this matter?

BENTON. It is your privilege, Miss Lathrop, to dispose of your own as you see fit; but I must say that, whatever happens, my sympathy is with Miss Belinda, for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration.

SEL. Well, you're a plain spoken young man at all events. I like your nerve. Belinda.

BEL. Yes.

SEL. (*tremulously*). Have you any excuse to offer for running in opposition to—to—a poor old woman—that was—fond of you, Belinda? (*Wipes eyes.*)

BEL. I'm truly sorry to grieve you, Aunt Selina, but I've merely followed the dictates of my own heart.

SEL. Your own heart? Fiddlesticks! I've lived a lonely life, Belinda; I haven't always been happy. I wanted you to be. They say that your sole ambition is to propagate the cause of suffrage; but I don't want my money squandered for that purpose. I want it to found a home, and, if you had married—

BEL. (*quietly*). I am married, Aunt Selina.

SEL. What?

MR. L. Belinda, are you crazy?

CRAIG (*in consternation*). Good heavens!

MRS. L. Oh, I shall faint!

(MR. L. *fans* MRS. L. *vigorously*.)

SEL. Explain yourself, miss.

BEL. (*moving near BENTON*). Mr. Benton and I were married this evening.

MR. L. How did you dare—?

BEL. Aunt Selina did not specify whom I should marry.

BENTON (*taking BEL.'s hand*). Belinda and I have been contemplating this step for some time. I had the license and was only waiting for Belinda's permission to speak to you—

BEL. (*interrupting*). Lee knew nothing of Aunt Selina's intentions until this evening, when I persuaded him to have the ceremony at once and explain afterward.

MRS. L. You might have confided in your mother, Belinda.

BEL. You and father espoused the cause of—some one else so fervently, that I feared you would show Lee little kindness. (*To GRAY.*) I can only apologize to you, Henry, and say that

I should have prevented father from sending for you if he had let me.

GRAY. Do not mention it, Belinda; I think I'll say good-night. (*Bows.*)

CRAIG. And, as I am going your way, I'll be excused also. (*To BENTON.*) Please accept my congratulations.

BENTON. Thank you.

CRAIG. Good-night.

ALL. Good-night. [*Exit CRAIG with GRAY.*]

SEL. (*to BEL.*). So you couldn't quite make up your mind to relinquish the money after all?

BEL. More exactly, I could not make up my mind to marry Henry Gray.

SEL. There's where you showed your good sense. (*Takes BENTON's hand.*) Nephew Benton, if I'd had the least idea that you would take a fancy to my flyaway niece, I'd have insisted that she marry you, though (*grimly*) that would hardly have helped your cause. You won't let the suffragettes get my money.

BENTON (*smiling*). Not all of it, Aunt Selina.

SEL. Herman, don't stand there petrified. Can't you shake hands with your son?

MR. L. (*shaking hands*). Why, Benton, I'd never thought of you.

MRS. L. I've always liked you, Lee, but this excitement is terrible for my poor nerves.

(*Gives BENTON her hand.*)

SEL. Forget your nerves, Louise, and think about getting me a cup of tea. I'm growing too old for scenes like this.

(*BENTON rings bell.*)

MRS. L. We're going to have luncheon —

SEL. I never eat at night, Louise, and you know it. (*Enter MARIE.*) Bring a cup of hot tea, please. [*Exit MARIE.*]

BEL. (*taking BENTON's hand*). Oh, Lee, this all seems like a dream. Can it be true?

BENTON (*softly*). A blessed reality, dear, or, at least, if it's a dream, I trust I'll never wake up.

MRS. L. (*weakly*). A dream? A nightmare I call—most of it!

Enter MARIE with tea, which she hands to SEL. Exit.

SEL. (*sipping tea*). Well, Lee Benton, all I have to say is that, considering the nervous susceptibility of this family, next time you had better give them a little warning.

MR. L. (*mopping his forehead*). I hope there'll never be any next time, and I'm glad that I've no other children; for I'll confess that I'm completely worn out marrying Belinda.

(*All laugh.*)

CURTAIN

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